NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
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# MAKING THE MOST OF PEACE AND HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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The U.S. military has traditionally been engaged in peace and humanitarian operations. These operations support the current National Security Strategy and can be counted on to constitute future military missions. The debate over whether or not the military should be tasked with such missions has outlived its value. Attention should be turned to the questions of *when* and *how* the military can be most effectively employed in these operations.

Numerous benefits can be gained when the military undertakes peace and humanitarian operations. However, significant costs can also be incurred. The most important factor determining whether the benefits will outweigh the costs is mission accomplishment - success. Another critical determinant is time, with shorter operations resulting in greater benefits and lower costs.

Historically, peace and humanitarian operations with clear, limited objectives have produced more successful outcomes than complex missions or protracted peace-intensive operations. To maximize the net gain for the nation, strategic decision-makers are encouraged to continue to selectively engage with operations that meet these parameters.

Proper preparation by military units can reduce the amount of combat skill degradation that typically results from the execution of peace and humanitarian operations. Service-wide usage of a deployment cycle, like the Navy-Marine Corps model, will further mitigate the costs of these operations.


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## ABSTRACT

The U.S. military has traditionally been engaged in peace and humanitarian operations. These operations support the current National Security Strategy and can be counted on to constitute future military missions. The debate over whether or not the military should be tasked with such missions has outlived its value. Attention should be turned to the questions of *when* and *how* the military can be most effectively employed in these undertakings.

Numerous benefits can be gained when the military conducts peace and humanitarian operations. However, significant costs can also be incurred. The most important factor determining whether the benefits will outweigh the costs is mission accomplishment – success. Another critical determinant is time, with shorter operations resulting in greater benefits and lower costs.

Historically, peace and humanitarian operations with clear, limited objectives have produced more successful outcomes than have efforts to resolve protracted, complex crises. To maximize the net gain for the nation, strategic decision-makers are encouraged to selectively engage when clear, limited objectives can be defined and adhered to.

Proper preparation by military units can further improve the prospects for success and reduce the amount of combat skill degradation that may result from the execution of peace and humanitarian operations. Service-wide usage of a deployment cycle, like the Navy-Marine Corps model, can also mitigate the costs of these operations.

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## INTRODUCTION

As long as it has been in existence, the United States military has been engaged in low-intensity conflicts, relief missions, small-scale contingencies and a wide assortment of diversely named operations that all fell quite short of full-fledged war. Despite the traditional significance of these tasks, many defense intellectuals have contested the suitability of these missions for the military and vice versa, pleading that the role of the U.S. military is to fight and win America's *wars*. Others who have studied the issue disagree, contending that these operations "have been part of the roles and functions of the U.S. military since before the founding of the republic."[1] The value of this debate has overstepped its bounds. Under the right conditions, the military *can* be effectively engaged in such operations. Perhaps more importantly, under many conditions, it *will* be. Accordingly, attention should be turned toward an effort to determine *how* and *when* the military can be *best* employed for these missions upon which it will definitely be embarked.

This paper will address those questions with regard to missions that fall into the realm of peace and humanitarian operations. The benefits gained and the costs incurred when the military undertakes these operations will be discussed; benefits and costs to the nation as well as to the military itself. Weighing all of the factors and considerations, actions that the military can take to maximize benefits and mitigate costs will be proposed. Finally, historical insights will be drawn upon to offer guidance for strategic decision-makers and their efforts to recognize and select situations that are best suited for intervention with the military instrument of power.

## BACKGROUND – WHAT ARE PEACE AND HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS?

The *realm* of peace and humanitarian operations that constitutes the essence of this paper is actually comprised of three distinct mission categories, all of which fall under the broad heading of Military Operations Other Than War, MOOTW, the current catch phrase for the multitude of military missions short of war. Missions ranging from Combating Terrorism to Noncombatant Evacuations, from Arms Control to Strikes and Raids, and many others are all officially categorized as MOOTW.[2]

The first of the MOOTW mission categories to be accounted for here is Humanitarian Assistance or HA. Joint doctrine defines HA as "programs conducted to relieve or reduce the results of natural or manmade disasters or other endemic conditions..."[3] Although not explicitly stated, the definition goes on to imply that HA programs are conducted oversees, not domestically. Such domestic operations fall under a distinct type of MOOTW, Military Support to Civil Authorities, which is not intended to be part of this analysis.

To a lesser extent, the paper will address a mission category that is often confused with HA but, is actually distinct - Humanitarian and Civic Assistance or HCA. HCA is provided in conjunction with military operations and exercises that fulfill unit training requirements and incidentally provide humanitarian benefit to the local populace. In contrast to emergency relief conducted under HA operations, HCA programs generally encompass planned activities such as medical care, well drilling and construction.[4]

The final category of MOOTW to be specifically addressed is Peace Operations, including peacekeeping and peace enforcement. Peace operations have been coupled with humanitarian assistance missions on numerous occasions. As noted above, HA can be provided in response to *manmade* disasters, the nature of which often necessitates the

conduct of a peace operation in order to successfully provide the assistance. The frequency with which HA and peace operations have been simultaneously conducted has warranted the coining of new phrase to describe that combination: *complex emergencies*. Because they are so closely tied, it is almost mandatory to consider both when discussing either.

To facilitate discussion, the three categories of MOOTW to be considered, as noted above, will be collectively referred to as peace and humanitarian operations, including those conducted either simultaneously or separately.

While many of these terms are new to the working vernacular, the missions to which they apply are anything but recent developments. Current indicators give us no reason to believe that these missions will soon cease. A congressionally chartered commission on the roles of the U.S. armed forces found that America's future will be marked by diverse contingencies and a broad range of missions to support evolving national security policies.[5] The document that drives all such policies, the National Security Strategy, specifically states that "smaller-scale contingency operations ...including humanitarian assistance [and] peace operations...will likely pose frequent challenges for U.S. military forces."[6] There is no need to question whether the military *should* be tasked with these missions; the fact is that it *will*.

**BENEFITS – THE BANG FOR THE BUCK**

At the strategic level, peace and humanitarian operations directly and significantly support the National Security Strategy and its charge to *Shape, Respond and Prepare.* It is important to note that the Strategy embodies a balanced approach to protecting national interests, balance across the instruments of power and within the military instrument. Rather than singularly focusing on *preparing* for future war, the military is called to devote

resources to efforts intended to, among other things, decrease the likelihood that war will ever occur. In that pursuit, the *shaping* component of the strategy continues to emphasize forward presence and engagement, through programs like HCA. Peace operations and HA also support *shaping,* yet they are further justified in answering the Strategy's call to *respond* to the crises of today. While this may appear obvious, those who continue to argue against these operations have apparently failed to grasp or accept the essence of the Strategy.

With an ear towards increasing globalization and international commitments, the Strategy states that "America must continue to lead."[7] Global leadership cannot be maintained without global involvement. Developing nations are not likely to accept American leadership without evidence of U.S. commitment to their interests – humanitarian and otherwise. Again, to execute the Strategy, the need is obvious for the United States to remain engaged, albeit selectively. Peace and humanitarian operations are an essential element of that engagement and a key means by which the military carries out the Strategy.

Peace and humanitarian operations present the potential for numerous benefits at the operational level as well. Humanitarian assistance, in particular, can provide an opportunity to gain initial access to a country or region that would not have otherwise been obtained. Severe circumstances have the potential to create *willingness* among foreign leaders and populations to accept the presence of U.S. military forces that, under less pressing times, would be overtly prohibited. The precedent set by initial entry can produce an increasing acceptance of an American presence, either actual or potential. Assuring such access is increasingly important, considering the ongoing concern that future adversaries may employ access denial strategies to which the United States could be vulnerable. Operation SEA ANGEL provided an opportunity for U.S. forces to be present in Bangladesh on a scale that

would not have been acceptable in the absence of a major disaster. Although successfully executing SEA ANGEL did not *assure* future access, it did enhance America's image in the region and the possibility that future access could be obtained.

Gaining access on even a single occasion can provide an opportunity to gather information. The planning and execution of any significant military operation involves a wide variety of players and interested parties. Contacts are made, cultural awareness is acquired, and knowledge is gained regarding infrastructure, logistics, host nation support and a series of issues that could prove useful for future contingencies. Beyond making contacts, senior military and civilian officials can use peace and humanitarian operations as springboards for the development of enduring relationships – furthering military and political interaction in the pursuit of regional interests.

The opportunity to establish and exercise working relationships at all levels is particularly valuable as the breadth of interaction required to succeed in contemporary operations is growing to a magnitude unfamiliar to most military members. "Complex humanitarian emergencies increasingly feature a large number of nonmilitary organizations operating in the same environment as military forces."[8] Calling it the *interagency process* would be an understatement as the contacts go well beyond the bounds of government control. "Today, U.S. military forces, whether engaged on the battlefield or conducting humanitarian-assistance operations, are likely to encounter a bewildering array of non-governmental organizations (NGOs)…vital to the achievement of U.S. political and military goals."[9] Whereas training could improve the prospects for effective civil-military interaction, exercising such skills in the course of an HA operation is one of the best possible opportunities to enhance effectiveness for future, potentially more significant crises.

At the unit or tactical level, the performance of peace and humanitarian operations can improve training and readiness with regard to a wide range of tasks and capabilities. National Guardsmen report that assistance missions in Latin America sharpen mobilization and operational skills, improve readiness and prepare them to support deployments anywhere in the world.[10] Performing assistance missions "provides the U.S. Army, in general, and the Corps of Engineers, in particular, with a training opportunity to prepare for war in time of peace."[11] The truth of this matter is that many logistics and support skills and related levels of readiness are particularly improved in the course of peace and humanitarian operations.

Tactical units also stand to enjoy improved morale as a result of assistance missions. National Guardsmen deployed on HA missions have been quoted saying: "'I think it's good somebody is doing something for these people...it's a good thing for the soldiers and a good thing for the country.'"[12] Such comments are not unusual. Rather, they represent the sentiments typically expressed by active, reserve and guard personnel alike in the course of successful assistance operations.

Previous peace and humanitarian operations have "demonstrated that the elements of operational design used in joint campaign planning apply to humanitarian assistance operations."[13] The corollary is that HA operations provide opportunities to hone conventional military operational planning skills. While the principles of MOOTW vary from those of war, experience gained by planning real-world contingencies is a substantial benefit at both the tactical and operational levels that should not be underestimated.

Finally, conducting successful peace and humanitarian operations can have beneficial effects on a key pair of issues that impacts all levels of military organization: The widening gap in civil-military relations and the associated questioning of the relevancy of a large

military establishment given the absence of a competing superpower. Without the looming threat of a near-peer competitor, the American people have difficulty understanding the need and accepting the cost of a military focused on *preparing* for war. In the public eye, the military appears much more relevant when it is actively *shaping*, through presence and planned military engagement, or busily *responding*, even to smaller-scale contingencies, than when it is *preparing* for threats that do not yet exist. When response and shaping operations bring the military in close association with NGOs and other civilian organizations, many that have been among the military's biggest critics, the civil-military gap is being bridged. When the professionalism of service members is placed in clear view, the entire military establishment earns respect and civil-military relations are advanced. In general, successful military operations will enhance the image of the U.S. armed forces and positively effect both of these issues. Such far-reaching implications may not be readily apparent. Nonetheless, they must be considered to formulate and implement effective policy.

## COSTS – THE BUCK STOPS HERE

While peace and humanitarian operations are certainly not executed without benefit, it is equally certain that there is another side to the coin – the costs. Pentagon officials, weary of the time lost to humanitarian missions, have argued that they "cut into combat training exercises, tie up equipment and personnel and take increasingly scarce defense dollars away from other operations focused on the Pentagon's primary mission of making sure U.S. armed forces remain strong enough to win two regional wars."[14]

The effect that these operations have on combat readiness is perhaps the most commonly voiced complaint. Officers at the Army War College with experience in peace

operations were surveyed in an effort to research this issue. The results indicated that units deployed for peace operations were likely to suffer degradation of combat capabilities during the course of the deployment.[15] Peace and humanitarian operations do not afford units the opportunity to train or exercise many essential tasks that are critical for combat readiness. The time that Army units spend engaged in these operations is typically taken from time that would have been dedicated to training and exercises designed to enhance combat readiness.

Another recurring concern centers on the dollar cost of peace and humanitarian operations and its impact on, again, training and readiness. Generally, the responsibility to fund peace and humanitarian assistance operations is borne, at least initially, by the military services. A 1993 study warned that "the future readiness of the services will be impacted as Operations and Maintenance funds are increasingly used to finance these costs."[16]

The *future* is now, as evidenced in Congressional testimony by the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Logistics: The impact of contingencies on overall readiness "is that whereas the deployed force was and still is highly capable and ready, those forces preparing for deployment face a significant challenge in achieving the levels of readiness required for deployment."[17] The Admiral's testimony rings an old adage - *Robbing Peter to pay Paul.* It's a phenomenon that is not limited to the Navy. Another recent report echoed the alarm: "To offset such operations' costs, the services draw on operations and maintenance accounts of units that are not deployed. In turn, these units curtail training, defer maintenance and atrophy in terms of warfighting capabilities."[18] Even the National Guard, which often embraces these operations, cannot escape the fiscal realities. Guard units providing assistance to Honduras in the aftermath of hurricane Mitch expressed grave concern with the expenditure of funds earmarked for training and the likely impact on unit readiness.[19]

The equipment used in the execution of peace and humanitarian operations adds another element to the financial burden imposed. During the testimony cited above, the Admiral also noted that these operations "are using engineer equipment and gear intended for Major Theater War, and it is negatively impacting readiness and increasing equipment life-cycle costs."[20] Equipment is required to complete these missions and the cost to maintain that equipment generally increases with its rate of usage. A report prepared by the Congressional Research Service contained a similar finding, noting that "interventionary operations also impose other penalties related to operational tempo – wear and tear on equipment as well as strains related to personnel issues."[21]

The wear and tear on military service members themselves is one of the most crucial costs involved. The frequency and duration of deployments and, subsequently, family separations have increased over the past decade, with the Army and Air Force experiencing the biggest jumps in terms of percentage of forces deployed over time. While force reductions have contributed to this change, the impact of recurring deployments for peace and humanitarian operations is equally significant. As service members and their families see the *cost* of these deployments, in terms of separation, outweighing the *value*, humanitarian or otherwise, morale and retention suffer. Indeed, retention goals have become increasingly difficult to meet over this same period of time.

The final cost to be considered is the one that is most difficult, if not impossible, to place a value on – the lives of U.S. service members. 'Acceptable casualties' is a concept that the military mind must be resigned to. When vital national interests have been truly at stake, it is concept to which American society has given its consent. However, when lives are being lost for the sake of lesser interests, the concept is justifiably called to question.

Although a number of lives cannot be assigned to equate to the potential value of any military operation, this potential cost must be acknowledged and duly considered in the evaluation of peace and humanitarian operations, individually and collectively.

## MYTHS AND OTHER MATTERS

"Interventionary operations require a mindset at odds with warfighting."[22] "These very different tasks attract different personality types...nurturing and fighting are not easily compatible."[23] Such comments are ubiquitous. They are also totally unfounded. Refuting the *myth of the warrior mentality*, an Army study reported that no evidence was found to support the suggestion that service as a peacekeeper makes it difficult for a soldier to serve subsequently as a warrior.[24]

While it is not necessarily good or bad, there is something about MOOTW that is, well, different. The Secretary General of the UN has made such an observation, commenting that "the nature of warfare has changed...the dividing line between combatants and civilians has become less clear cut."[25] Joint doctrine points out another change, noting that "logistics elements may be employed in quantities disproportionate to their normal military roles."[26] In fact, logistics forces may play the *primary* role and combat forces may find themselves in a *supporting* role. This represents a complete reversal of the traditional relationship between these forces. While both primary and supporting roles are critical to the success of any operation, emphasis must be placed on the primary and those forces tasked to achieve it.

Although these variations from standard practice do not introduce either costs or benefits, they do represent a few of the distinctions that must be acknowledged and properly planned for in order to avoid potential pitfalls in peace and humanitarian operations.

## ACTIONS – GETTING THE MOST FOR YOUR MONEY

With so many costs and benefits vying for effect, it is easy to see that either side could get the upper hand and render a given mission either wasteful or worthwhile. Thus, it is imperative that, from individual units to the National Command Authorities, steps are taken to promote the benefits and constrain the costs of peace and humanitarian operations.

For starters, how should the military prepare? Some would say not at all: "Its capabilities can and should be used for humanitarian and other civilian activities, but the military should not be organized or prepared or trained to perform such roles."[27] Their contention is that the military should only prepare for its *primary* role of combat and should devote no effort whatsoever to anything that could in any way detract from combat readiness. It seems preposterous that the military should not even *prepare* for a mission it is sure to get.

The argument against preparation is shortsighted. It does not look beyond immediate impacts. Granted, combat readiness may *initially* suffer as a result of these preparations. But, what happens over a longer period of time, one that includes the conduct of peace and humanitarian operations? It is over this timeframe that combat readiness must be measured.

A follow-on survey was conducted at the Army War College to further assess the impact of these operations on combat readiness.[28] The survey clearly reported that the units represented by the second group of respondents devoted more time to prepare for the operations upon which they embarked and, during the operations, suffered less combat skill degradation than did the units in the initial survey. While other factors, such as the types of units and the specific missions involved, may have contributed to the results, the survey sends an important signal – preparing for peace and humanitarian operations can reduce the degradation of combat readiness that results when units are deployed for such operations.

With that understanding, units should plan on being tasked with peace and humanitarian operations and structure training such that *after* those operations are completed, combat readiness will be at the highest level possible. Fortunately, this approach appears to be gaining acceptance. Army leaders who have participated in peace operations are becoming unanimous in their call for some level of specific preparation for such missions.[29]

In addition to training individual units for anticipated operations, unit deployment schedules over a broad section of the individual services can be structured to further mitigate the negative impacts. Essentially, the Navy-Marine Corps model is advocated, in which units prepare for deployment, deploy, and stand-down in a recurring pattern or deployment cycle. Training conducted in preparation for deployment results in a high level of combat readiness at the beginning of deployment. During the course of the deployment, those combat skills that are exercised will be maintained while skills that are not will gradually erode. Losses of trained personnel during the deployment will account for further skill degradation. By the end of the deployment, overall readiness may have declined. However, at the service level, this is not problematic, rather, it is expected as the cycle has produced another unit that is at peak readiness for its upcoming deployment. The cycle enables the service to maintain a set level of combat readiness while conducting peace and humanitarian operations.

Developments such as the Air Expeditionary Force emulate this cycle and should continue to be pursued. Unfortunately, the Army, which has incurred a sizable share of the MOOTW burden, has not implemented a similarly structured cycle. Admittedly, the Army's ability to fully apply such a system may be impeded by the number and type of units remaining in its drastically downsized force. Nevertheless, with a forecast filled with these operations, the Army needs to move toward the Navy-Marine Corps model.

The model's usage of units already designated for deployment to execute peace and humanitarian operations offers additional advantages. Concerning the effects of increased operating tempo on personnel and retention, maintaining a predictable deployment cycle spreads deployed time relatively evenly across units and personnel. While this doesn't reduce deployed time at the service level, it does reduce the chance for individuals to bear an undue share of the family separations. Furthermore, it enables all parties to plan and prepare for deployments further in advance, improving unit *and* family readiness for deployments. Finally, tasking deployed units for these operations, as the model does, reduces the financial burden on the services. Utilizing assets that are already deployed has been found to make the military a more cost-effective means of delivering and supporting humanitarian assistance.[30]

While proposals have been made to radically restructure the force and earmark or create units specifically for peace operations, Army research found that it makes the most sense to conduct these operations with existing forces.[31] Cost considerations support the findings but, they do not prevent the Army from scheduling deployments among the existing forces along the lines of the Navy-Marine Corps deployment cycle.

As previously noted, peace and humanitarian operations can have either positive or negative effects on combat readiness. A General Accounting Office report published similarly mixed findings, attributing the variations to several factors, including the nature and duration of the mission, the type of unit involved, and opportunities for training in-theatre. The report went on to note that units deployed for these operations can initially experience improved mission capability but, over an extended period of time, will suffer degraded combat skills.[32] The key factor involved here is an important consideration in many of the issues discussed – *time*, with a consensus that shorter is better.

For strategic decision-makers, the question becomes: How can we choose to engage in operations that will be relatively shorter rather than longer? This is a difficult question to answer. Generally, the duration of an operation will be based on the amount of time required to accomplish the mission – to succeed. Incidentally, many of the potential benefits cited above are contingent upon the success of the operation. The truth is, to be successful, we must first succeed; a great deal is riding on it.

A quick look back at recent history reveals several such operations that were, overall, successful. SEA ANGEL provided humanitarian assistance to the flood ravaged peoples of Bangladesh. PROVIDE COMFORT gave humanitarian assistance to the displaced Kurds in northern Iraq and, with requisite security forces, ultimately enabled the Kurds to safely return to their Iraqi villages. PROVIDE RELIEF and RESTORE HOPE effectively accomplished their missions, facilitating and securing the delivery of food to famine-stricken Somalis.

On the other hand, RESTORE HOPE evolved into a peace-enforcing mission under UNOSOM II that resulted in the loss of service members' lives, an operational failure and an embarrassment to the United States. A decade earlier, an initially successful deployment to Lebanon evolved into an ambiguous attempt to *facilitate* peace. The result was similar, only worse, as more lives were lost. In Bosnia, the military was sent in to keep peace. The operation has not failed. However, the clock is still ticking, leaving no doubt that it will last longer rather than shorter. All of these operations involved complicated, peace-oriented missions that could not be rapidly achieved with the application of military force.

The successful operations, or portions thereof, all had well defined objectives. SEA ANGEL was simplified by its permissive environment – service members did not even carry weapons – and the operation was never thrown off its primary course. PROVIDE

COMFORT was less permissive as potential clashes with Iraqi soldiers loomed while the Kurds were relocated to their villages. However, the primary task was unswerving – move and protect the Kurds – and was readily accomplished. Even in the course of RESTORE HOPE, prior to UNOSOM II, American forces had a significant security risk to cope with. But, their primary mission was clear – move and protect the food – and this they did.

Notwithstanding the ultimate success or failure of an operation, which will have the biggest impact on the benefits derived, extending an operation's duration will have, at best, a negligible effect upon the benefits cited above but, will result in a pronounced worsening of the costs. Consequently, decisions to engage in complex contingencies and protracted peace and humanitarian operations must be made with acknowledgement that the costs are assured to escalate and that many of the benefits will be riding on the outcome – is it worth the risk?

The above discussion is based on self-interests from the national perspective. Another consideration that must be weighed before the military instrument is employed for humanitarian assistance is the impact that such employment could have on regional development goals. The U.S. military is very capable of massing assistance in relatively short periods of time. Whether or not that is a good thing is subject to another debate. Suffice it to say that short-term assistance can, under certain circumstances, adversely impact long-term development efforts. For example, food distribution in Somalia lowered prices to the point that it became unprofitable for farmers to plant, reducing harvests for several seasons. In light of this reality, the military should only be called upon to provide assistance when circumstances are extremely severe and short-term benefits would outweigh long-term costs. Even then, civilian development professionals should be closely consulted to ensure that the overall effects of assistance missions are as beneficial as possible.

## CONCLUSIONS

Peace and humanitarian operations are traditional roles of the United States Armed Forces. Such operations directly support the current National Security Strategy and can be counted on to constitute future military missions. Accordingly, the military should plan and prepare for these missions, at both the unit and operational levels, such that combat readiness will be maintained as high as possible over the long-term, including periods of execution and recovery.

The net gain to the nation, considering military costs and benefits as well as implementation of the National Security Strategy, can be maximized by intermittently engaging the U.S. military in peace and humanitarian operations with a relatively shorter expected duration and a higher probability of success. Historically, operations with clear, limited objectives have best met these parameters and expectations, and should continue to be periodically and prudently pursued. Complex, peace-intensive operations can be expected to have a longer duration and a lower likelihood of success and, therefore, should only be pursued for truly vital national interests.

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